

presented a paper entitled “Family as a Concept and as an Institution in Islamic Social Thought: A Theological-Philosophical Perspective.”

His paper discussed the concept of family in Islamic social philosophy and its place and role as a social institution. According to Professor Bakar, the idea of family first arose in human thought with the need to categorise and differentiate human relations, particularly blood relations. He pointed that, in the Islamic perspective, family is not merely a social institution in the secular sense of the word; family also possesses a sacred character. It is regarded as a religious institution in the sense that it exists to serve as an instrument to help man realise the twin goals of his existence in accordance with God’s cosmic plan. The twin goals in question are of servitude (*‘ubūdiyyah*) and vicegerency (*khilāfah*) and equivalently of man’s perfect relationship with God (*habl^{um} min Allāh*) and man’s perfect relationship with fellow men (*habl^{um} min al-nās*). Islam views family as the most fundamental social unit and institution insofar as the human pursuit of these twin goals is concerned. The relation of the family to society is analogous to the relation of each biological cell to the body. Societal health presupposes family health. A crisis in the family institution can have grave consequences on the wellbeing of society as a whole. According to Professor Bakar, the role of the *sharī’ah* in Islam is, among others, to provide guidance to human beings to secure a healthy and happy family in which each member is taught and strives to be a good servant of God and also a good citizen. His presentation also touched on the idea of the ‘chosen family’ as conceived by Islam and its spiritual and leadership role in Islamic history.

(Report by Christoph Marcinkowski, IAIS Malaysia)

**Resolution of the ‘International Workshop for Islamic
Scholars and Experts in Modern Biotechnology
on Agribiotechnology – *Sharī’ah* Compliance’
(Georgetown, Penang, Malaysia, 1–2 December 2010)**

The world population has almost tripled since 1960 and the percentage of undernourished people has also increased. Besides being net importers of food and agricultural products, members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) are mostly least developed countries, characterised by rampant hunger and extreme poverty whereby close to 2.7 billion poor people spend 80 per cent of their income on food. Food availability and accessibility for the Muslims should therefore be addressed to identify strategies to solve this problem in the midst of increased population and food and energy demand, decreasing food production resources and climate change.

The writer of these lines went to this workshop with a degree of circumspection about the *sharī'ah*-compliance aspects of genetically modified (GM) food and agro-industries. Having reviewed the scientific data to the effect that about one-third or more of food grains would be lost to insects had it not been for the scientific intervention to make the seeds insect resistant – instead of using more insecticide chemicals. Similarly without the aid of benign scientific intervention the issues of food sufficiency and security could reach unmanageable proportions. This writer chaired the inaugural session of the workshop and also made a presentation on relevant *sharī'ah* guidelines of concern to the workshop agenda. He returned from the workshop with a sense of conviction that agribiotechnology observes duly-organised criteria of scientific accuracy and thus merits recognition and support from the *sharī'ah* perspective.

Crops developed through modern methods of plant breeding termed as biotechnology (biotech) or genetically modified crops such as rice, soybean, corn, rapeseed and cotton with improved quality and quantity traits available in the market (biotic stress and herbicide tolerance) have been accepted and are being cultivated globally in 25 countries (in 2009) and are being used as food and feed in the majority of other countries. Efforts to improve crop plants' tolerance to abiotic stresses such as drought and salinity (which are more relevant to the needs of OIC countries) are also ongoing. Records show that almost all members of the OIC have been importing these commodities from the large GM crop producing countries. In continuing promotion of global acceptance of biotech crops, OIC Members and Islamic scholars should be aware of GM and its benefits to accept the biotech agricultural products as *ḥalāl* for the society.

With a focus on alleviating the existing food problems and poverty, the 'International Workshop for Islamic Scholars and Experts in Modern Biotechnology on Agribiotechnology – *Sharī'ah* Compliance' held in Penang, Malaysia, on 1–2 December 2010, agreed upon the following resolutions:

1. Islam and science are complementary and support beneficial scientific innovations for mankind. Modern biotechnology and genetic engineering are important developments that merit promotion in all OIC Members. Regulatory measures should facilitate the acceptance and use of GM products particularly by Muslims. Genetic modification and GM products are *ḥalāl* as long as the sources from which they originate are *ḥalāl*. (The only *ḥarām* cases are limited to products derived from *ḥarām* origin retaining their original characteristics and are not substantially changed.)
2. Modern biotechnology and genetic engineering are methods of plant improvement and intrinsically are not different from other plant improvement techniques from the *ḥalāl* point of view.

3. In ensuring food security, our Islamic obligations require us to urge all Muslim countries, governments, international organisations and research institutions, to support research and development and use of modern biotechnology, genetic engineering and their products.
4. Because of their positive impacts on agriculture and the urgency of food security for the Muslim *ummah*, promotion of modern biotechnology and genetic engineering are considered *farḍ al-kifāyah* (collective obligation) and should not be neglected from the *sharī'ah* point of view.
5. Public awareness and education on modern biotechnology and genetic engineering, demand continuous interaction with the Islamic scholars, scientists and the general public.
6. Transparent and complete scientific information should be available for the interested stakeholders for informed decision making.

(Report by Mohammad Hashim Kamali, IAIS Malaysia)